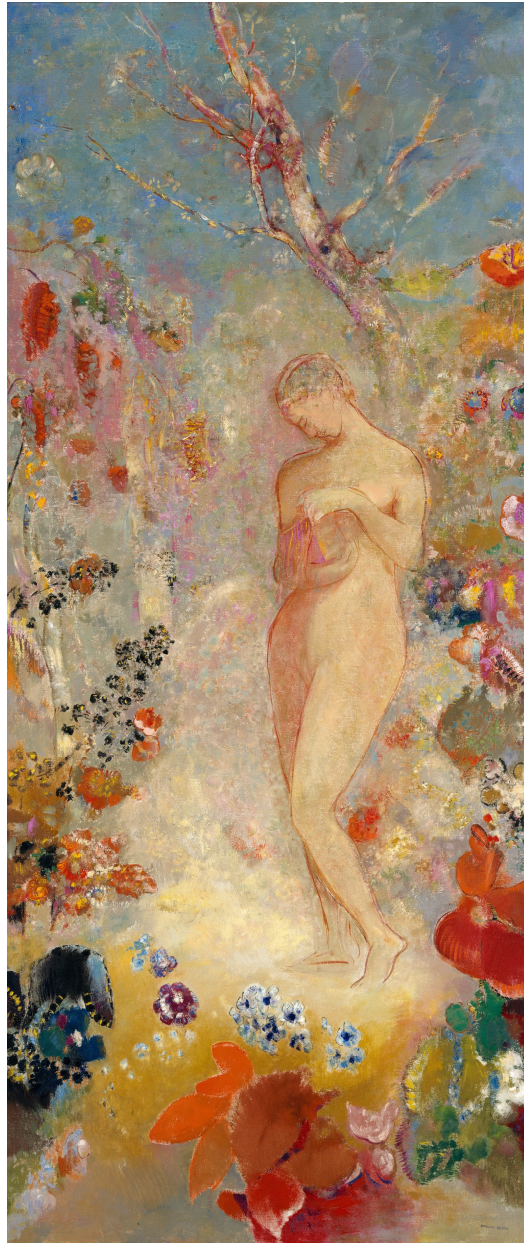


Sketches of the Inchoate

Information and Belief



By Charles Davi

Sketches of the Inchoate

Table of contents

“The office”,	page 3.
“The open house”,	page 5.
“Another transponder”,	page 7.
“Estampes”,	page 9.
“Michael Bolton”,	page 11.
“The awful boat”,	page 13.
“I’m from New Jersey”,	page 16.
“Physical graffiti”,	page 18.
“Don’t get too excited”,	page 19.
“Eurovision”,	page 20.
“The studio: Emilie”,	page 21.
“The studio: No need for speculation”,	page 22.
“The studio: The control room”,	page 24.
“The studio: The live room”,	page 25.
“The studio: Clara Schumann”,	page 28.
“The studio: Ida’s gift for me”,	page 29.
“Super loser”,	page 30.
“We are who they once were”,	page 31.
“The song of our house”,	page 32.
Musical references,	page 33.
“Pandora”,	page 34. †

The office

Today I'm working on thermodynamics -

Specifically, the first question I considered at the intersection of information theory and physics, about six years ago:

How much information do you need to describe a thing?

One conclusion that I reached, about six years ago, is that light must be the simplest substance we're aware of, in terms of how much information it takes to describe its behavior -

Just point a lit flashlight at a wall.

How would you describe what the light did to get there?

You'd merely have to point in the direction that it traveled, since the speed of light is constant.

So if you want to describe what light does, all you have to know is the direction that it's going, and then you know everything you need to know to about its motion.

Now compare that to throwing a plate of spaghetti at a wall -

If you want to account for the movement of the noodles, you'll need a lot of detail, since they'll all do different things, possibly moving at different speeds, in different directions, at different times.

There is of course more to my work than just a flashlight and some noodles, with the commercial goal to describe complex systems using simple code -

If you can do that, then you can predict how a system will behave on a cheap computer, which has applications that range from farming, to defense.

And I've done exactly this, today, so now I'm headed home.

I pack up for the day -

I open up a new pack of printer paper, that I use to keep my notes, writing down an outline of my work.

Once I'm done, I wipe the dry-erase board clear, using the eraser, doubling back with a wet cloth.

Then I punch three-ring binder holes in my notes, add them to a binder that's been accumulating, for about a month, I'll eventually have picked up,

scanned, and placed into storage, and uploaded to a system I can search, later on, if I need to.

I'm working for a private U.S. aeronautics firm, getting paid to do this type of research in A.I., having left my old job about a year ago.

Ida simply switched her office, working out of Copenhagen, which was fine with her, since she has a lot of friends in the city, and in Malmö.

I told her I'd be making more than I was before, with a year's worth of severance, if the new job doesn't work out, so she was fine overall with the move.

What I didn't mention is that I sold some rights in my core algorithms, which allow almost every problem in machine learning to be solved quickly on extremely cheap computers -

They can turn a \$150 tablet, into a supercharged 10-year old, that can read, and recognize objects, but also track the path of about a dozen rockets, and predict 10,000 steps in the future, in an instant.¹

I hid this not to lie to her, or protect my wealth, since it's probably not protected by local law, in any case -

I did it so we keep things steady, so the move would be simpler, and this news would soon surprise her on the upside.

I told her the truth about the matter she was most concerned with, which is my salary, leaving the additional good news for another day. †

¹C. Davi, "A New Model of Artificial Intelligence", available here.

The open house

Walking around Copenhagen, we often visit open houses, with old brownstones being our favorite.

We came upon an old brownstone on a quiet block, with a bright blue door, draped in vines, potted flowers hanging outside the windows, and a pale brick exterior.

We saw the sign for an open house, and decided to have a look inside.

There were a bunch of people floating around, with the broker near the door, standing near a tiny fold-up desk, with a bunch of business cards on top -

She was polite, but assertive, shaking both our hands, Ida's hand first, handing each of us a business card.

The house is very old, with wide-planked, weathered, hardwood floors, an old wooden staircase, terminating at an exposed landing, with a wrap-around, wooden banister.

The house was completely empty, and so the tenants must have moved already, which suggests they're either too rich to care about the cost of the house, or getting desperate for a closing.

In either case, they're clearly done with the place, suggesting that it can be taken.

Ida seems immediately taken as well, walking up the stairs, on her own, I can see her fingers brush the old, rough railing on the banister, as she stares up toward the landing, eventually disappearing, into one of the rooms at the top of the stairs.

I stay put, staring out, through the railroad layout of the first floor, out into the kitchen, then through the kitchen window, getting faint glimpses of the backyard, just beyond -

I can see the daylight, broken up by a moving tree, lightly swaying in the wind, casting moving light along the floors, walls, and ceilings of the house.

Ida comes back out, peeking in the bathroom at the top right of the landing, seeing me below, with a look I've never seen before -

A calm more than happy, serene in her slower motions, her hand again hovers down the railing, fingers lightly touching on its rough grain, beyond the light let in by the kitchen window, someone new opens up the front door, and Ida gets lit up, breaking through her newfound stoicism, leaving just a simple grin, looking at me with a subtle love, leaving me now sharing in her grace.

...

The next day I email the broker:

“Hi Anna -

I'm interested in the house, what are next steps?”

To which she replies, a few hours later -

“Hello Charles,

I'd like to set up a phone interview, to be sure it all makes sense, as we have an offer, near the asking price.

What day works best for you?”

To which I immediately reply,

“I'll pay .03% over asking, cash.”

To which she quickly replies -

“Hi Charles,

That's great, but we'll need to run a background check first, and so I think we'll still need to do a call, before we move ahead.”

And I fire back, copying my banker -

“Anna -

Please meet Espen, he can get you any info that you need.

Espen -

Please see below, and coordinate with Anna.

I'd like to get this closed as soon as possible, so please keep me posted on any issues that pop up.

Thanks,

Charles”

We close on the house, six weeks later. †

Another transponder

Driving over the Øresundsbron Bridge into Malmö, I play, “Hurricane”, by Mat Zo.

“This is a bit aggressive.” she says, to which I reply,

“Give it a minute.”

A large group of seagulls fly along the car, just beyond the bridge, with enormous clouds lining both sides of the horizon, beginning where the horizon meets the sea below, and up hundreds of feet into the air, though the sky above is perfectly clear -

I take a sip from my water bottle, and she gestures, asking to have a bit as well, so I pass it over to her.

I quickly look out my window, to see an airplane at cruising altitude, making its way above the giant wall of clouds, painting a clean horizontal line parallel to the horizon below, with a second plane at what seems to be another few hundred feet above the first, heading in the opposite direction, in roughly our direction of motion, and Ida asks,

“Why do you always look at airplanes?”, to which I reply,

“I don’t know how it got started, but one time I actually found legitimate mechanical insight from it, so now it’s become a habit.”

“You’re a proper freak.”, she says, with a somewhat awkward pause afterwards.

The song takes off about a minute later, and I can see she really likes it, as she squeezes my leg, saying,

“I’m sorry that I tease you for your strange behaviors -

I see they work for you, and so I don’t mind.”

“Thank you, your majesty.”, I reply, looking forward.

So she pinches my leg.

Now about four minutes into the song, we approach its climax, the kick repeating, leaving, alerting us to something new to come -

Synth pads bouncing, vocals panning, the bass line slowly rising, into higher registers, the bridge itself, rising from the road below, into a suspension structure, for the second time, with beams repeating, rapidly, as we barrel on, echoing

the sky on either side, I see her looking up to trace their path, then descending, like a landing, as I see her joy, in the animated structure of the world around us -

Our decisions, however meager, contribute to a moving portrait, that we share, together, as coauthors and spectators of an uncertain future, and a certain now.

She looks out the window as we leave the beams behind us, looking outward, singing to herself, this time content with my participation in her song.

She looks down at the windshield, seeing the small American flag stuck upon the glass, smiling at me, in my cliché, understanding my love for New York, and America as well -

That I could come from nowhere else, at least on this Earth. †

Estampes

On the drive back, I tell her that I have a few surprises -

She's a bit tired, leaning on my shoulder, and asks,

"Will they require much effort on my part?", and she quickly adds,

"Please tell me they don't involve that awful boat.", to which I reply,

"There are no boats at all involved, just a bit of walking, but not that far from our apartment.", to which she says,

"Fair enough, I'll oblige.", as she again rests her head on my shoulder.

...

I park the car in our usual spot, down the block from our apartment, and as she gets out, she says,

"So which way are we going?"

And I point, as the both of us head onward, now hand in hand, with Ida visibly a bit tired, episodically resting her head again against my body.

We get up to the house, and she says,

"I knew you did this -

I cannot believe you, Charles."

I take out the key, and open up the front door, having already set the dimmer the night before, together with a blanket, tealight candles, a bottle of cannonau, to remind us of Sardegna, with two, tall, wide glasses set on top.

There's another light, at the top of the landing, just above a painting that she didn't see at the openhouse, so she leans her head in, walking closer to the painting, getting closer to the base of the staircase, and upon recognizing Odilon Redon's, "Pandora", she exclaims,

"Now, I didn't think you did that -

You're a maniac, that must have cost a fortune."

"Yes.", I reply.

...

She starts to take off her shirt, as the warm chords of, "Estampes", by

Debussy begin to play, and so I do the same, laying my shirt on the blanket, just before me, under the old chandelier, with those thin, faux-candlestick lights, the crystals hanging under, partially illuminated, in the dim light that I've set it to, as I move over to lay my back atop my shirt, she moves to climb on top of me.

I can see the Redon at the top of the stairs, as we kiss, seeing Ida, somehow the subject of a painting, from a century ago, made by a man, I only somewhat jokingly think at times, is himself made to look a bit like Odin -

Having stolen Ida, just for me, from Heaven itself, paying with his life for his generosity.

She opens her eyes, knowing that I never close mine, and sees me staring up, knowing more or less now what I see, she slips down to lay atop my chest, the back of my head now against the floor, looking up into the chandelier above -

Motionless, just like us, glowing of a different sort, till the song is over, both of us knowing, we're to get up at the end, put our clothes back on, turn the lights off, and walk home, together, because it's finally just the two of us. †

Michael Bolton

Ida's in our kitchen eating breakfast, while using a shared computer, that's logged into my iTunes account, looking for something to listen to -

She notices that I've played the same Mø song, 56 times in the last month, and so she gives it a listen, with a bit of suspicion.

She hears the opening word:

"Baby".

Thinking, albeit briefly, perhaps I'm using the song, as some kind of sexual device, repetitiously, but she dismisses this, with confidence, as not only unlikely, but also uninteresting.

But then upon hearing the closing phrase of the opening line, "You hold me in your arms, like your red guitar", knowing I had a red guitar in college, she grows legitimately paranoid, looking up Mø online, as she eats an open-faced sandwich, on hearty, Danish bread, with cheese and sliced cucumbers, sipping her coffee -

Staring at images of Mø, scrolling, only to realize that Mø looks a lot like her, who looks a bit me as well, adding to her jealousy, which consciously, she knows makes no sense at all, but she nonetheless can't help but wonder, whether there's something there, since if it were true, I would likely never tell her, and so she broods on the idea, of the secret relationship, with the Danish celebrity, while she eats her breakfast, in the kitchen, ultimately deciding that simply asking me about it is the best, and most mature solution to the problem.

Continuing to listen, to strengthen her case, she he hears the line, "I want both of those hands on me", and gets legitimately jealous.

Then, "I don't have to sleep." -

And now she can't help herself, almost angry, at the thought of sleepless, relentless sex, between myself and Mø.

She survives to the end of the first chorus, which again closes with the word, "baby", seeming to add insult to injury, now convinced that it's at least not impossible that the song is in fact about an affair between me, and a Danish celebrity, Mø, and that I've orchestrated this confession, perhaps even writing the song with Mø, given the seemingly unending use of the word, "baby", that Mø is, "losing her mind", briefly even identifying with Mø, and of course, the "red guitar", and Mø's appearance, which is very similar to Ida's, and bizarrely, somewhat similar to mine, noting my narcissism as an additional factor, contributing to the plausibility of this seemingly implausible theory.

She realizes, that suddenly, she's now forced to evaluate incredibly unlikely things, as at least possible, and she struggles with their probabilities -

What was previously totally disregarded, must now at least be considered, leading her in this case to experience jealousy in proportion to the actual occurrence of an event, despite knowing its probability is minuscule, even given these compelling factors.

So she walks into the living room, as I'm sitting on a couch, reading the Financial Times, and she asks -

"Do you know Mø, personally?"

I pause, put the paper down, and look up at her, for a moment, sizing up the situation, and once I realize what she's getting at, I start laughing -

"Did you sleep with Michael Bolton?", I ask.

She starts laughing, "I hate you, you watch, I'm going to find out", to which I say,

"Is that a yes on the Bolton thing?"

She walks back toward the kitchen, turns around to give me the finger, while still walking away, smiling, and once back in the kitchen, puts the song on, again, this time, extremely loud, now singing along -

"Oh, oh oh, **baby** -

You hold me in your arms like your **red guitar**.", with great emphasis on the words, "baby", and "red guitar", dancing in the kitchen, as if she's holding a microphone, singing into a sponge.

"Wow, you're a loser." †

The awful boat

Its condition suggests a negative price, but I nonetheless offer a modest, positive sum of money, about 5% less than asking, insisting on discount only because it is truly awful, and will require hours worth of cleaning.

The man claiming title to the boat arrives shirtless, to a swamp, on the outskirts of Nyholm, Denmark.

Ida is visibly uncomfortable, with everything, looking in disgust at the measly boat, covered in some kind of green, living moss, that has also occupied the already rustic seats, made of simple wooden slats.

The man climbs into the boat, and after leaning in towards the engine, he inserts the key, turns the engine on, as a demonstration, apprehensive, presumably because the engine is ultimately disastrously loud, producing a lawnmower-type noise, totally incommensurate with the power of the small engine.

He looks up at me, as I stand on the dock, eyeing the frame of the boat, and he's clearly concerned this will be a dealbreaker, prompting me to stand up straight, and exclaim,

“Excellent, I’ll take it.”

He smiles, first at me, then at Ida, visibly missing a few of his teeth, his tattoos faded, and somewhat reflective in the warm Sun.

I lean into the boat to shake his hand, as he reaches up to the dock, now the both of us excited, I take out the stated sum of money, he hands me the key to the engine, and gives me a captain’s salute, quickly jumping out of the boat.

Ida and I both get into the boat -

I sit in the back, near the engine, as she stands, politely refusing to sit without saying, so as not to offend the man, as the man waves us both off, clearly happy with the trade.

“You paid too much.”, she says.

...

Ida is incredibly embarrassed of the boat, still standing, as we take it through the rather scenic, crowded areas along the river, near the Opera House, back toward the dock I’ve already rented, assuming I would get a boat sometime soon, having discussed the matter with Ida -

This is not the boat she had in mind.

...

It's a small piece of plastic that's obstructing a belt inside the engine, doing visible damage to the belt, and making a preposterous noise as well -

The plastic in question is attached to the shell of the engine, twisted off a bit, but because it's attached only to the shell, I wager I can simply clip it with a pair of pliers, which I do, to no immediate consequence, other than solving for the noise.

Then I clean the boat, which begins with sanding the entire wooden frame, with a manual, hand-sander, which takes me hours.

The moss is disgusting, and requires the additional use of a spackle, before sanding, to scrape the slimy nonsense off the surface of the boat.

This leaves the boat filled with dust and dead moss, but I can see that a garden hose and rag will do the trick at this point, so I take a break, have a beer I've placed in a freezer, in a communal shed, attached to the dock, which clearly deserves a better boat -

Newly constructed, with a grey wood base, a wide walkway, and generous spacing in between boats, with tall, modern, aluminum lights, fit for a public park, lining the dock, ultimately suited for a much larger boat, surrounded by fairly expensive sailboats and powerboats.

I stare out into the harbor, with my legs hanging off the dock, remembering a morning after Syttende Mai, years ago, as a single guy, getting kicked out of a woman's apartment, first thing in the morning, having only my tuxedo to wear, spending about an hour watching the sunrise in the port of Oslo, with my legs dangling off the pier, near the Nobel Center, just like now, as if I were staring into today -

Context is everything.

...

After hosing down the boat, I consider doing research on some coating for the wood, which looks a bit raw, but I risk a single trip, just to celebrate with Ida:

The finish ends up a roughly uniform grey, not quite matching with the color of the dock, with noticeable green spots, from the moss, that are simply in the wood itself -

I dress it up, buying two white cushions that I tie to the wooden slats, making proper seats, but the bottom line is, it's a piece of a shit, but now it's

clean, and not noisy at all, ultimately docked in an incredibly beautiful city, so it all works.

..

Ida sees the boat, and is legitimately impressed, and as I stand near the back of the boat, as she's still on the dock, I turn the engine on, with the gestures of a magician, and she nods like some maiden being courted, noting the improvements -

I take her hand, as she climbs off the dock, entering the boat, and sits in the front seat, looking around for a moment, signaling an overall, cautious approval.

We take the boat up toward Fisketorvet, deciding to cook dinner at our apartment, and use the trip as an excuse to shop somewhere different.

She sees the Bluetooth speakers in the center of the boat, facing up, and connects to them, playing, "Not Going Anywhere", by Keren Ann, and we ride off, smiling and waving at people as we pass them by. †

I'm from New Jersey

Everyone other than Ida and I end up going out to some club I've never heard of, pretty far outside the city center, including Jeff.

They all walk into the club, and it is from Jeff's perspective no different from any other club he's been to before, save for the company he's with, and the people at the club, most of whom are Danish -

The music is loud, generally background house music, of the type they play at Le Bain, that seems an unending medley of indifferntiable baselines, all with a steady beat, the music changing so gradually, you never notice the changes at all, absent conscious effort.

Jeff is not a fan, but he understands the utility of this type of music, in an environment where you need to fill the void, creating demand for a type of primal communication, of which he is a master.

He gets to know everyone well enough beforehand, so there's only incremental schmoozing left to obtain the arguably unwanted status of the center of attention, which is something he can't do without, due to his physical stature, and imposing personality.

So he it makes it happen -

He identifies the most likely point of friction, Ron, the petite gay man, who appreciates Jeff's intellectualism, after hours with him at our home beforehand, but is nonetheless naturally a bit distant from the large, lumbering, heterosexual male.

Jeff eventually charms Ron to the point that Ron is later seated atop Jeff's shoulders, bouncing Ron up and down to the beat of the music, as Ron sings along to a song he happens to know -

This catches the attention of a group of Danish girls, in their late twenties, seeing a petite man, in tight, high-legged shorts, perched atop the shoulders of a beast, with both men laughing hysterically, in earnest, at the presumed absurdity of the scene.

One of the girls makes eye contact with Ron, who waves them over, and seeing a sizable table filled with free drinks, before a couch fit for dancing, they're now completely sold on the matter -

Ron taps Jeff on the chest, like some kind of giant horse-man, who gently places him back on the dance floor, both giving each other a giant hug afterwards, while still laughing.

The girls approach, and Ron offers them drinks, as does Jeff, one of the girls immediately firing off at Jeff in Danish, which is not surprising, given his appearance, which borders on the cliché Nordic man:

Tall, fit, with blond hair, fair skin, albeit a multiple up in scale.

Jeff replies to her in English,

“I’m from New Jersey.”, causing her to laugh, already softened up a bit from the scene before involving Ron.

She says, somewhat loud, leaning in so he can hear, with the music blasting, as he’s now standing behind the table, with her before it,

“What’s your name?”

“Jeff, how about you?”, he says, to which she replies,

“Pernilla”,

He repeats,

“Pernilla?”

And she says,

“Yes, you’ve got it right.”, to which he says,

“Just making sure -

So what do you want?

We’ve got vodka, Hendrix, and some champagne too, which you’re welcome to, but we don’t have a lot.”

“I’ll have champagne, if that’s OK.”

So he pours a glass, and she laughs a bit, as he lifts an already thin champagne flute, which now looks comically tiny in the full context of his massive frame -

As he carefully pours the champagne, she can see that he is oddly delicate, succeeding without any spillage, then recalling the way he placed Ron back onto the dance floor, immediately puzzled by an apparently complex person from New Jersey. †

Physical graffiti

There's only one late-night food option outside of the club, which is basically a grocery store, that stays open late only because of the club, giving them a brand new source of income.

Jeff walks in with Pernilla, both of them completely obliterated, after several hours of heavy drinking -

Jeff now confronted with an ocean of foreign labels, written in what appears to be heavily vandalized English, he spots a wooden cubby filled with bananas, a familiar food, and so he moves upon his prey, grabbing a bunch, still attached at the stem, roughly a dozen in number, and marches to the counter, simply pointing at the bananas with his credit card, while looking at the clerk, who nods, prompting Jeff to simply hand the clerk his credit card. †

Don't get too excited

Jeff and Pernilla get out of a cab, both hysterically laughing at nothing.

Jeff then opens the door to the house, prompting Pernilla to exclaim,

“Fyfan, who is your friend?”

Upon seeing the landing of the staircase, unclear if she recognizes the painting, but in any case, with the sense, this is not a normal set up.

“Don't get too excited”, he replies, pulling up the chain that then lifts a trap door in the floor, exposing the staircase to the studio below, in the basement.

She looks at him, grinning,

“This is mental.” †

Eurovision

Jeff is sleeping on the couch in the basement studio lounge, unfolded into a bed, together with Pernilla -

He wakes up first, to total darkness, since the studio has no windows, and no incoming light, but for the two staircases, which Jeff has left concealed.

He desperately needs to vomit, and knowing there's a bathroom, he grabs his phone to use it as a light, but it's not enough to navigate -

Spotting a light switch, he accidentally turns on a bright neon light that says, "This is not a door", hanging above what is plainly a door, now glowing bright red in his face, somehow adding to his nausea, annoying him, though he leaves it lit.

He then spots what looks like another light switch, which apparently does nothing, which he angrily flips up and down, but it is instead the volume fader for a set of headphones mounted on the wall of the studio lounge.

Finally, he spots the remote for the TV, which he wagers should provide enough lighting, when on.

Confused, and desperately hungover, still otherwise in the dark, he turns on the television, sincerely hoping for some kind of brightly-lit programming that will end his drunken woes:

It's a best-of Eurovision show, glaring at an unreasonably loud volume, which Jeff fears he has no time to adjust, featuring a male singer, wearing what is in essence a figure skater's outfit, throwing his body about a preposterous stage, with cheesy pyrotechnics, audibly exploding, basically shouting into a microphone, in what strikes Jeff as most likely to be German, as he briefly stares in disbelief at the TV, thinking for a moment this could be a telethon for mentally ill people, having seen some phone numbers flash, that are instead intended for voting -

Hearing positively awful, saxophone-heavy music, as the singer parades about the stage in spandex, with innumerable flairs, flying about, positioned inopportunistically along the singer's lanky, and highly visible frame, with a deep-cut tank, snug around the crotch, exposing copious chest hair, all of this ultimately expressed in a totally alien language.

Jeff, now able to see somewhat, quickly spots and grabs an ice bucket from the table below the TV, and vomits -

Pernilla bursts into laughter, then hiding herself under the blanket. †

*The studio**Emilie*

We're seated in the control room of the studio, that I've had built into the basement of our house, which spans the entire length of the house underground, giving me plenty of room to work with.

I've put on a song by Emilie Nicolas, "Sky", to demo the space, and the clarity possible in the studio's control room.

I've already set the volume to a level that is very loud, but not uncomfortable, to show that the control room allows music to be listened to at high volumes, certainly without any distortion, certainly without any rattling whatsoever, and moreover, no perceptible changes to the frequency distribution of the sounds.

As the opening percussive bells strike, Jeff says,

"The panning is so pronounced in an environment like this -

I forgot what it's like to listen to music in a studio:

It's just not the same.

I can hear every detail of the recording, it completely unfolds."

He looks over to see the woofers of the NS-10 speakers above the console visibly oscillating to the strike of the bass drum at the drop of the chorus, reverberating after, pumping a fluid, creating the impression that something is alive, as Jeff thinks he hears Emilie say the word, "animal".

The second chorus comes in, confident again he hears Emilie say the word, "animal", as he feels a wave of chills wash over his skin, terribly excited by this tiny Norwegian woman, now in a location unknown to him, her mind nonetheless animated, in the room, with him, filling the air around him and in him, like a ghost.

No need for speculation

There's something about the outside world you want to remember later on -
How do you make that happen?

Your actual human memory can handle only so much, so you need something in the outside world to store it, which means you need a system that lets you represent the thing in question.

Language is probably the first generalized method human beings developed for doing exactly that.

Musicians developed their own language, to represent music, filled with the familiar dots and lines, and Italian annotations.

But both words and notes represent ideas.

What we're looking for instead is something more concrete:

A representation of an actual thing in the outside world.

For example, a portrait lets you represent an image, and perhaps to better remember it, though perhaps it could instead eventually replace the actual memory.

A photograph notches up the quality of representation, since the process eliminates the role of a human interpreter of facts, and is instead automatically driven by machine -

This assures an accurate accounting of whatever's there, though it could still of course be incomplete.

So as we transition from human language to photograph, we slip from idea and into physical reality, where your mental associations are no longer necessary to the core message of the representation.

The process that generates the representation also slips from the subjective, and into the mechanically objective -

Two people will probably use different words to describe the same thing, but they have almost no control over what happens inside a camera, once the conditions of the photo are fixed, making the representation deterministic after that point.

Now imagine looking at sheet music -

If you can't read it, then you're looking at a nonsense thing, and so your

mental associations matter.

Now instead listen to a song you've stored on your phone -

It doesn't matter what you think, at least in terms of listening, since the sound is physically real, compressing the air around you, directly triggering your senses.

In the latter case, your associations are important to a tertiary message, which is the meaning of the song, that you can't understand unless you feel, and in some cases, unless you analyze its structure.

When you see a note, you have to imagine what it sounds like.

When you hear a note, you don't have to do a thing.

What modern media did generally was to create a new, generalized method for representing the outside world -

You can take a picture, or record a sound, perhaps record the temperature, all allowing the conditions at the time to be recorded and recalled.

Digital technology took this idea right into the extreme, allowing absolutely anything to be represented in a single universal language -

Binary code.

This turned the giant tape machine I laboriously cleaned and loaded reels onto as a college student, into a program you can now buy for a few hundred bucks, allowing the type of signal processing that just a few decades ago required millions of dollars worth of equipment to be done on a laptop.

This is a longwinded way of saying that our studio is much more elaborate than it needs to be, both in size and in scope, and is instead a piece of memory, recreated -

A representation of my past, so that I can remember who I am, and where I come from;

It's roughly two thousand square feet of New York City, buried in a basement, in Copenhagen -

The ghost is the real thing.

The control room

A quality recording will accurately represent the sounds it is intended to record.

A quality playback device will accurately unpack a representation of a sound.

A quality set of speakers will accurately amplify the signal generated by a playback device.

A quality control room won't change the sounds coming out of the speakers, due to reflections and absorptions in the room.

And so the recording process begins with a sound, slips into representation, and then ends again with a sound.

The control room is where you listen to the sound of your recording, and change it to suit your imagination, or a client, if you're me in college -

But now I have no clients, and no one else to please, other than my Ida, and my imagination, and so everything I do reflects this.

The live room

Through the sliding glass doors behind the console, is the live room, where you record live instruments, and vocals -

Rectangular, wider than deep, and wider than the control room -

The control room has additional insulation and wiring in the walls, and a deliberate structure shaped to create an acoustically neutral environment, that doesn't change the sounds emitted by the speakers.

What you hear in the control room is as close as you can get to the undisturbed ghost that made the recording.

The live room is instead acoustically dead, so the moment you make a noise, the sound terminates, once it hits a surface in the live room, with no noticeable echo, creating a very strange environment, even for conversation, since your voice doesn't carry at all.

This is achieved by padding the walls and the ceilings, with absorbent foams and fabrics, and covering the entire floor of the room with a thick, Persian-style rug that is specifically designed for the purpose of absorbing sound, but nonetheless gives the visual impression of an otherwise ordinary patterned rug, with an overall reddish hue, and white fringes.

The ceilings are lower in the control room, to model the original studio I grew up in, about 9 feet high, but the live room has towering, 20 foot ceilings.

The second stairwell down into the studio enters the live room, at the back left of the room -

It was built to accommodate the movement of equipment, and large instruments, and so it's more than double the width of a normal staircase, causing the trap door above in the kitchen floor to be incredibly heavy.

To make this more manageable, we had a gearbox mounted to the kitchen wall, adjacent to the trap door, with a crank that lifts the chain, which is attached to the trap door, which when closed, leaves the chain slacked, and flush into a cutout in the surface of the trap door, so we don't trip on the chain.

The live room is empty, save for three items:

A single bass drum set, with three tom drums;

A Hughes & Kettner amplifier;

A black Steinway grand piano.

All other incidentals, like XLR cables, microphones, and mic stands, are kept in a closet in the live room.

The piano is on the center right of the room, with the keyboard visible upon entry.

I also bought the portrait of Clara Schumann by Lenbach, which hangs on the wall to the right of the piano.

The drums are on the left, roughly opposite the piano, with the drummer's seat positioned just a few feet from the left wall.

The closet is a roughly double-wide, walk-in closet, built into the right wall of the live room, to the right of, and just behind the piano, opened by pulling on the right hand side of what appears to be another sound panel, that doubles as the door to the closet.

There's a large and heavy sleeping bag in the closet, that we use to drape the drums when recording piano, and drape the piano when recording drums;

There are also fresh, white, hotel-style towels on a rack -

If you're a real musician, you might sweat.

The original chandelier from the house is hanging from the center of the live room, having been replaced, with an assemblage made from twenty interleaving small gold metal chandeliers, each with bulbs atop gold metal branches, extending outward from a gold metal center, like a blasted atom, then assembled into a large collective whole, with the branches and bulbs interleaving within, shaped more or less exactly like its parts at its perimeter, with each component chandelier independently suspended, which I designed myself.

I understand that hanging a chandelier in a live room is a bad fact for acoustics, creating some reflections, maybe even sympathetic vibrations, but this is our home studio.

Moreover, even when pounding on the drum set, I've never heard a rattle, because the floors and walls of the room are so dead.

The only thing hitting the chandelier, as a practical matter, is the concussive force of the air from the cymbals moving, and the drum skins vibrating, which isn't enough to move the needle, and actually make an unwanted, audible noise.

There are panels of XLR inputs mounted into the walls of the live room, just above the floors, connected to the patch bay in the control room, which in turn allows for connection to the A/D converter, and the outboard compressors and effects modules -

This is how you take a sound picked up by a mic in the live room, and pump it to the control room, and ultimately record it.

Each panel of inputs is demarcated by a thin blue line above, which you can see from a distance.

Clara Schumann

Ida's playing Estampes, looking out the windows of the kitchen, as I sit at a small iron café table with a marble top, having coffee, reading the weekend edition of the FT, and I see her staring out the window, off into the yard, watching the tree in our yard move about the breeze, just like I did the day we found this place, but with both of us now closer to the window -

Small, leaded glass panels, in a fairly large, iron-frame, painted white, only slightly distorting visibility, and only upon conscious effort to observe the uneven surface of the glass.

She's in a white, floral-printed cotton dress, with small and sparse, but bright coloring, echoing the colors from our yard.

The walls of the kitchen are pale red brick, but with tiling above the sink and stove, which are just below the window, with an arabesque pattern, blue and pale yellow color.

"I bought the Clara Schumann painting that I showed you a few months ago.", I announce, which I suppose was rude to both of us, since we were otherwise both lost in introspection.

"Wasn't that in the Robert Schumann house?", she asks.

"Yes."

"How did you manage that?", she asks.

"I have nothing else to do.", to which she replies,

"You're a moron."

...

While I'm out with Ove, who's visiting us, Ida goes into the studio -

Descending the smaller staircase, into the studio lounge, through the control room door, with the absurdist signage, walking past the console, sliding the door open to the live room, looking up into the chandelier above, then standing, her hands on her hips, staring at the portrait of Clara on the wall, she tries to understand why I've done this -

Looking closely at Clara's eyes, she becomes reminded of me, without conscious effort, and so she understands, and I have no one to forgive.

Ida's gift for me

Ida spends months studying the Brahms Intermezzo Op. 118 No. 2, ultimately playing it for me on a Sunday afternoon, in our studio, as I sit not far from the piano, with the portrait of Clara not far from Ida.

I say afterwards,

“That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever done for me.” †

Super loser

The fucking loser super that couldn't muscle the ambition to fix the wobbly railing up the stairs in the shit hole that I lived in when I was 12.

Fuck you -

I'm still making music. †

We are who they once were

I think some people are awful because it is a cheap way of being relevant -

I don't have that problem. †

The song of our house

Ida says,

“Charles wrote a new piece, dad.”

I read some of his papers online, and I don’t understand them, and he intimidates me as a result.

This never happens to me -

I literally rewrote Einstein.²

He works mostly in group theory, which two Norwegian mathematicians, Niels Henrik Abel, and Sophus Lie, contributed heavily to -

This annoys me, because I know it implies that he knows combinatorics, which is close to my area of math, but I don’t know group theory.

As a consequence, he can do things that I cannot, which again, annoys me, and makes me nervous around him.

“Have you had a chance to record it yet, Charles?”

“Yes, but not with live instruments, though the production is passable.”

“I’d certainly like to hear it, if you don’t mind playing it -

There’s an auxiliary cable attached to the hifi that you can plug your phone into, which is right over there.”, he says, pointing at a black eighth-inch cable, resting to right of what looks to be a tube amplifier.

I plug my phone in, pull the song up, and press play -

There’s a sizable delay that I’ve left into the recording, before it begins, giving me time to get back into my seat.

...

“That was fantastic Charles -

What is it called?”, he says, to which I reply,

“The Song of Our House.” †

²C. Davi, “A Computational Model of Time-Dilation”, available here.

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. Mat Zo, “Hurricane” (2013).
2. Claude Debussy, “Estampes” (1903).
3. Karen Marie Ørsted “Mø” Andersen, “Beautiful Wreck” (2018).
4. Keren Ann, “Not Going Anywhere” (2003).
5. Emilie Nicolas, “Sky” (2017).
6. Johannes Brahms, “Six Pieces for Piano, No. 2” (1893).
7. Charles Davi, “The Song of Our House” (2020). †

Sketches of the Inchoate

*Pandora*³

When you fall,
Out of sight,
I slip back in my mind.

And I see a long game to play -
The cruelest of loves,
That's been found and then displaced.

Though it's not a way to spend your days -
Tracing out memories of a broken vase.

No it's not a way to spend your days,
But it's a longwinded way of saying that,
That I love you.
That I love you.
That I love you.
That I love you.

When you fall,
Out of line,
Just slip back in your mind,
And you'll hear a song, singing plain -
Proof that love has found a home in this place.

Though it's not a way to spend your days -

³The song, "Pandora", set to this poem, also written by me, is available here.

Rebuilding memories of a broken vase.

No, it's not a way to spend your days,

But if you want it,

Here's my way of saying that,

That I love you.

That I love you.

That I love you.

That I love you. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For, "Anna", in Denmark.